

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Status of Application

By this amendment, claims 104-112 and 121-126 remain pending. This is in response to the Final Office Action dated March 12, 2003 and accompanies: a request for continuing examination (RCE) filed under 37 C.F.R. §1.114, a Rule 131 Declaration of John H. Jebens and Exhibits, and a petition for a three month's extension of time to September 12, 2003.

General Comments

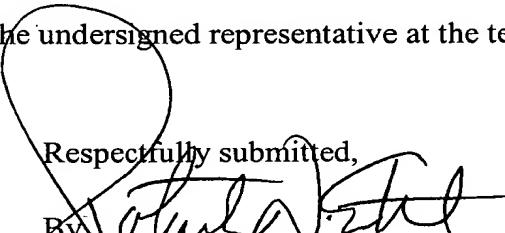
Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection of claim 104-112 and 121-126 as obvious over Fredlund et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,666,215) in view of Sheridan (U.S. Patent No. 5,760,917). Withdrawal of the rejection and reconsideration is respectfully requested.

Applicants have submitted concurrently with this Amendment a Rule 131 Declaration of John H. Jebens, which establishes a conception date for the invention disclosed and claimed in the present application well before the September 16, 1996 filing date of U.S. Patent No. 5,760,917 to Sheridan. The Rule 131 Declaration also demonstrates that the applicants exercised diligence to reduce the invention to practice from prior to September 16, 1996 until the August 11, 1997 filing date of the parent application. Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that Sheridan is not 102(e) prior art and that a *prima facie* case of obviousness does not exist with regard to the applied art.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that the above application is in condition for allowance. Applicant therefore respectfully requests that a timely Notice of Allowance be issued in this case. If there is any matter that the Examiner would like to discuss, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned representative at the telephone number set forth below.

Dated: September 12, 2003

Respectfully submitted,

By 
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